



Member's Signature

Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2006

Mr. Speaker:

Today, Puerto Ricans celebrate the 89<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of being granted United States citizenship by an Act of Congress. It is on this historic occasion that I, as Puerto Rico's sole representative in Congress, am proudly introducing on their behalf the *Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2006*.

Since 1917, we have cherished that citizenship, and the principles of freedom and democracy for which our Nation stands. Hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans have fought valiantly in all wars since then to defend those principles that we so strongly value, with 50 of our own making the ultimate sacrifice in our Nation's current War on Terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill I am introducing today honors the life and sacrifice of these heroes... heroes who have left their loved ones behind to defend our democratic values even as they themselves are unable to vote for their Commander in Chief.

After 108 years of being a territory of the United States, Puerto Rico's status dilemma remains unresolved. Over the years, many in Congress have expressed their willingness to respect the right of self-determination for the U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico yet, during that time, there has never been a federally sanctioned self-determination process.

On December 22, 2005 the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status issued a comprehensive and balanced report providing options for the Island's future status and relationship with the United States. This Task Force, created by Executive Orders from President Clinton and President Bush, clearly outlines in its report a process to address Puerto Rico's century old status dilemma.

The bill that I am introducing today simply implements the recommendations of the Task Force Report in order to preserve the guiding principles found in that report, which avoid prejudice towards a particular status option, and develops alternatives that are compatible with the U.S. Constitution and basic policies of the United States.

Some will argue that Puerto Rico's status should be determined by a select few, however, I sustain that, after 108 years of waiting, the four million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico deserve nothing less than a direct and meaningful vote. The *Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2006* guarantees that the terms and conditions of Puerto Rico's future be developed jointly and democratically by the people of Puerto Rico and the Congress and not by the whims of an elite few.

In supporting this legislation, Congress would finally sanction a real opportunity for the people of Puerto Rico to exercise their right of self-determination with a process that would allow for a direct vote from the people. The first plebiscite, which would be held during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, but no later than December 31, 2007, would allow the people of Puerto Rico to elect whether to remain a U.S. territory, or to pursue a path toward a constitutionally viable permanent non-territorial status. It would not be until a second plebiscite during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress that specific non-territorial status options would be defined, should the voters decide they want to opt for a permanent, non-territorial status.

Congress has a date with history. As a territory, Puerto Rico is subject to Congressional authority under the Constitution's Territorial Clause. After 89 years as U.S. citizens, we deserve the opportunity to provide the people of Puerto Rico with a process where, through their direct vote, they can choose the status of their choice. Congress must assume its constitutional responsibility and act now; otherwise the efforts of the Presidential Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status, established by President Clinton and President Bush, would have been in vain.

I wish to thank my many colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, who have agreed to become original co-sponsors of this bill, validating the recommendations made by the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status to commence a democratic process under which the people of Puerto Rico will be able to exercise their inherent right to self-determination. The four million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico deserve no less.